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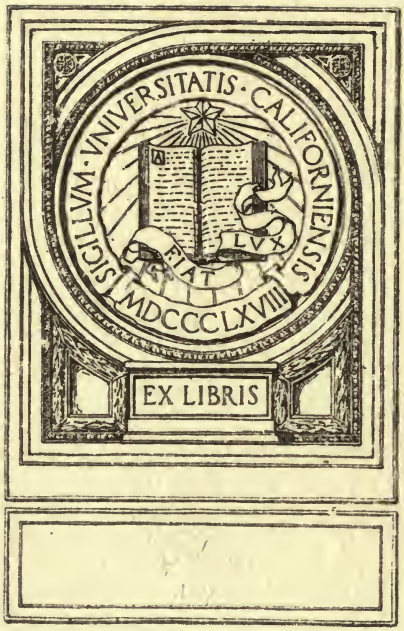
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VERMEER OF DELFT
YOUNG WOMAN READING A LETTER
RYKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM

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VERMEER OF DELFT
THE PAINTER IN HIS STUDIO
CZERNIN GALLERY, VIENNA

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Jan Vermeer of Delft

BORN 1632: DIED 1675
DUTCH SCHOOL

"FEW things are more unaccountable in the history of art," writes Sir Walter Armstrong, "than the vicissitudes which have attended the renown of the fascinating painter, Jan Vermeer of Delft. Famous in his lifetime, filling honored posts in his native city, accepted as a leader by his fellow-artists, and as the maker of desirable pictures by those who had money in their pockets, an almost complete oblivion seems to have overtaken him before he had been fifty years in his grave. In 1667, when Vermeer was no more than thirty-five years of age, he was named in Dirk van Bleijswijck's elaborate description of Delft ('Beschrijving der Stad Delft') as an artist who did honor to the city; Arnold de Bon, Bleijswijck's editor, celebrated him in verse as one of those who could console his fellow-townsmen for the loss of the painter Karel Fabritius; and yet Arnold Houbraken, in that 'Great Theater of the Netherlandish Painters' ('De groote Schouburg der Neerlandsche Konstschilders') published in 1718, in which he was kind to so many insignificant personalities, passes over Vermeer in silence, and sets an example which was followed by every one who wrote on Dutch art for something like a century and a half.

"It is humiliating to have to confess that, in all probability, the total neglect of a great artist was due to nothing in the world but this omission of his name by Houbraken, and yet Vermeer's pictures were there to proclaim his value. Many, no doubt, were given to others, especially to Pieter de Hooch; but enough were left to show that a great master had gone under, and was waiting for some one with wit and energy to pull him up."

No one appeared, however, to undertake the task until about fifty years ago, when E. J. T. Thoré, a celebrated French critic, better known by his pseudonym "W. Bürger," struck by the beauty of Vermeer's pictures and fascinated by their seductive charm, constituted himself the long neglected painter's champion, and devoted much time and study to the revindication of his fame. The various public and private galleries of Europe were now searched for examples of Vermeer's art, and although Bürger sometimes claimed for his favorite painter pictures which it has since been proved were

not his work, it should always be remembered that it is owing to this French writer's enthusiasm and zeal that one of the greatest of the Dutch masters was rescued from the oblivion into which he had so strangely fallen.

In his attempts to ascertain facts concerning the life of Vermeer—"the Sphinx," as he called him—Bürger met with but scant success, and it was not until after his death that through the researches of M. Henry Havard, who carefully examined the parish registers and archives of the town of Delft, as well as the record-book of the painters' Gild of St. Luke, the meager information that we have of the artist's life was learned.

Jan, or Johannes, Vermeer (pronounced Yahn Fair-mair) was born at Delft, Holland, in October, 1632. His name is frequently written "Van der Meer," of which, indeed, Vermeer is only a contraction; but as the latter is the form in which the name was written during the painter's lifetime, and the way in which he himself signed it in the record-book of the painters' Gild of St. Luke, it has been adopted here. In whatever way it be written, however, the words "of Delft" are usually suffixed, in order to distinguish the painter from others of the same name—by no means an uncommon one in Holland—from Jan Vermeer, or Van der Meer, of Utrecht, and from the two Vermeers, or Van der Meers, of Haarlem.

Of the parentage of Jan Vermeer of Delft we know only that his father, Reynier Janszoon Vermeer, was a citizen of Delft, belonging to the bourgeoisie, or middle class; that his mother was Dingnum Balthasars ("the daughter of Balthasar"); that the house they lived in was in the Vlamingstraet of Delft; and that his mother died a widow, and was buried in the Nieuwe Kerk (New Church) of the town on February 13, 1670.

From whom Jan Vermeer received his instruction in art has been the subject of much speculation. At the time of his probable apprenticeship, Delft was rich in painters of more or less note, among whom was one Leonard Bramer, presumably a relative of Vermeer's and a somewhat showy artist, who, M. Henry Havard is inclined to think, was Vermeer's earliest master, although no evidence of such a connection is to be traced in the two men's works.

Bürger's belief that the Delft painter at one period of his career studied under Rembrandt, whose influence he notes principally in Vermeer's only dated work, a painting of life-sized figures, now in the Dresden Gallery (plate VII), cannot be substantiated, especially as there is no evidence that Vermeer ever lived in Amsterdam, or came into personal contact with Rembrandt, but every probability, indeed, that his whole life was spent in his native Delft.

The artist to whom Vermeer shows himself most nearly akin is undoubtedly Pieter de Hooch, his senior by only two years. In spite of some technical differences in their work, there is sufficient similarity to suggest that an intimate connection may have existed between the two painters after De Hooch's establishment in Delft in 1655; and it has been thought that the two young artists may both have received instruction from one and the same source—from a painter of Amsterdam and a pupil of the great Rembrandt, who in

1652 settled in Delft. This painter, Karel Fabritius, is, indeed, generally regarded as the master of Jan Vermeer. Rich, well-born, talented, and with all the prestige which life in the great city of Amsterdam, and intimacy with the leading artists of the day assembled there, gave him, Fabritius quickly acquired fame in the city of his adoption, and it may well be that Jan Vermeer became a pupil of so prominent a painter, or at any rate that he was influenced by him.

When in the year 1654 occurred the tragic death of Karel Fabritius, who, while painting in his own house, was killed by the explosion of a powder-magazine, Jan Vermeer, then twenty-two years of age, was already a fully fledged and independent artist, inscribed on the books of the Gild of St. Luke at Delft as a master. That he was at this time poor is evidenced by the fact that when admitted to the gild he was obliged to pay by instalments the modest sum of six florins incumbent upon him as the son of a bourgeois in becoming a member of the society; and that it was fully three years before he found himself in a position to make the final payment.

Poverty, however, had not deterred Vermeer from marrying, and the same year in which he attained to the distinction of membership in the painters' gild, that is in 1653, when only twenty-one, we find it recorded that he was married to Catharina Bolenes, a young woman of Delft.

In 1662 Vermeer was elected to the honorable position of "Hooftmann," or dean, of the Gild of St. Luke at Delft, an honor which was again conferred upon him in 1670. This fact alone would prove that he had acquired a certain celebrity, and it is interesting to find in the journal of a French traveler and art lover of that day, Balthasar de Monconys, further testimony of his established fame. This writer records that when visiting Delft in August, 1663, he saw the painter Vermeer, whose vogue was then so great that he had no works of his own in his studio, and that to see one of his pictures Monsieur de Monconys was obliged to go to the house of a baker who possessed a single figure painted by Vermeer, for which the owner had paid no less a sum than six hundred livres, equivalent to about one hundred and fifty dollars,—a large amount in those days.

Vermeer's circumstances had evidently undergone a change, and his prosperity is further shown in the picture which he painted of himself in his studio, now in the Czernin Gallery, Vienna (plate x). This, the only authentic representation of the artist that exists, shows him richly attired and at work in a well-appointed room in no way suggestive of the straitened means which had necessitated the payment by instalments of his fee of admission to the Gild of St. Luke, of which later he became one of the leading members.

In the full tide of his success, however, we find Vermeer's death recorded in the registers of Delft. Under what circumstances it occurred is not related; we know only that it took place in December, 1675, when he was but forty-three years of age, that he left a family of eight children, and that he was buried in the Oude Kerk (Old Church) of his native town of Delft.

The Art of Vermeer of Delft

W. BÜRGER 'GAZETTE DES BEAUX-ARTS' 1866

SCHOOLS of painting are, as a rule, hierarchies, but that of Holland is, if I may so express it, a *panarchy*, for in that country each painter is a master, no matter in what particular line his specialty be shown. Van Ostade, Berghem, Du Jardin, Paul Potter, Gerard Dou, Cuyp, Wouverman, Van de Velde, Ruysdael and Hobbema, Ter Borch and Metsu, Pieter de Hooch, Jan Steen, and a host of others—all are finished and accomplished painters, each in his own particular style, even as were Rembrandt and Frans Hals. And in this galaxy of Dutch masters Jan Vermeer of Delft takes his place—the equal of the best. Like his fellow-artists, he is by nature original; what he did was perfect of its kind.

What sort of pictures did Vermeer paint? In the first place, every-day scenes representing the manners and customs of his time and of his country; to these may be added a few street scenes, painted in his native town of Delft—portions of streets, or perhaps the outside of a house; and finally, landscapes in which the air seems to circulate and the light to vibrate as in nature itself.

Some score of Vermeer's figure pictures have come down to us, which may well be classed in the same category with those of Metsu, of Ter Borch, of Jan Steen, and of Pieter de Hooch. But Vermeer has more accent than Metsu, more character than Ter Borch, more distinction than Jan Steen, more originality than Pieter de Hooch. Having begun by painting figures the size of life, as in the 'Girl and her Lover' in the Dresden Gallery, the small personages of his later pictures have retained a certain ease in their pose and freedom in the way in which they are rendered, and although no larger in scale than those of Ter Borch's little panels, they are painted with all the breadth and amplitude of Rembrandt.

Vermeer's salient quality, however, one that is even more striking in his work than is his feeling for form and expression, is his treatment of light. In his paintings the light is never artificial but always normal, always true to nature. Entering the picture from one side, it permeates the entire canvas, so that it actually seems to emanate from the painting itself, and the uninitiated might easily be deceived into the belief that some ray of the sun had penetrated between the canvas and the frame.

Rembrandt's color is golden in the flesh-tones and brown in the shadows; but Vermeer's lights are silvery in tone and his shadows pearl-color. There is no absolute darkness in his pictures—no slurring, no juggling. Light is everywhere, and even the chair, table, or spinet in shadow, stands as clearly revealed as if beside a window. But, at the same time, each object has its just amount of shade, and its reflections merge into the surrounding luminous atmosphere. It is to this faithful portrayal of light that the harmony of Vermeer's colors is attributable. In his pictures, as in nature, antipathic colors, for example his favorite blues and yellows, never jar. He harmonizes tones

which are in themselves discordant, passing from the tenderest minor key to the richness of a full major chord.

Brilliant, strong, delicate, and varied, at times surprisingly original and odd, and always invested with a certain fascination as indefinable as it is rare, Vermeer possesses all the qualities of the bold colorist to whom light is an inexhaustible magician.—ABRIDGED FROM THE FRENCH

CARL LEMCKE 'JAN VERMEER AUS DELFT'

JAN VERMEER OF DELFT was a painter of light and of sunshine. His chief aim was to fix upon his canvas the fleeting moment. What Frans Hals had done in portraiture, painting with unsurpassable skill and in the twinkling of an eye a passing expression of the human face—a smile, a laugh—that Vermeer as a landscape and genre painter delighted to do in regard to light. In his pictures time is never stationary—fixed for all eternity, as in the canvases of Rembrandt or Ruysdael—but rather, a moment, an instant, gleams and sparkles in the sunshine, and even the many shadows, which have lost their sharp outlines, seem by their delicate, unsteady contours to proclaim the living, moving qualities of light. Rembrandt, as we know, painted light in darkness, causing it to glow upon some one object or to bathe another in its waves; Vermeer, on the other hand, loved to paint darkness against light.

Gifted artist that he was, he had a wholly different scheme of color and a different manner of painting for his interior scenes from any that he used in his outdoor pictures. For these last he liked best that time of day when the colors of the landscape, with its trees, houses, water, etc., are strong and deep, when each separate object is clearly defined, and the whole scene in its harmonious beauty affects us as does a full rich chord of music; but for his interiors he preferred that kind of light which changes all the local colors and imparts to his favorite and often painted blues and yellows a peculiar tone. The room, the people in it, and the furniture as well, all seem to vibrate, so to speak, before our eyes; the blue of gown or chair looks as if candle-light would better suit it—as if, indeed, it must have lost some of its color in the light of the sun. One might suppose that the artist wished to represent the way in which things appear to us when we look with blinking eyes from darkness into light. We question whether Vermeer had a studio with pure north light; rather does it seem as if he must have preferred one facing south, so that he might always have about him that magic atmosphere which he represents.

One of Vermeer's peculiarities is that he frequently arranges his genre pictures in such a way that only half or three-quarters of his figures can be seen. Whole figures, such as we see in 'The Coquette' in the Brunswick Gallery, are exceptional. He generally brings the figures of his foregrounds close to the outer edge of the picture, and introduces the light through a window so that these figures, or any objects which may be in the forward part of the picture, appear dark, or at any rate dim; the middle distance and the background, on the other hand, are brightly lighted. We see, for example, through the opening in the wall through which we are supposed to be look-

ing, only the head and back of a man and the face and upper half of the figure of a girl, a corner of a table, and a portion of the cloth; farther back, half of an open window, and directly beside it a light wall. Or, again, we see in the foreground at the edge of the picture close to the frame, a table on which some garments have been thrown, and a chair entirely in shadow. The window is again close to the wall farther back, and near it, the light falling upon her, stands a lady fastening a necklace about her throat as she looks into a little mirror which hangs beside the window. The seat of the chair in the foreground cuts off her figure at about the height of her knees.

The fact that Vermeer often placed the people or the furniture of his foregrounds immediately in front of the spectator prevented his painting them full-length, because of the many difficulties that would be caused by the steep rise and fall of the linear perspective of floor and ceiling. Jan Steen did not trouble himself about such difficulties; not so Jan Vermeer; he avoided them, as a rule, by showing only a portion of the room, and but little—in some cases nothing at all—of either floor or ceiling. It is interesting to observe how he produces an effect, in many of his pictures, with horizontal lines, against which only the vertical lines of a seated or a standing figure are opposed. But when all is said and done, whether we examine more attentively the faces and dresses of his figures or the room in which his personages are placed, the effect of the whole picture—in a word, the light, upon which the artist has concentrated his attention as his chief aim and interest—always remains the principal thing. Vermeer is truly a master in his manner of modeling through the shadows in the foreground, and the strongly defined shadows near the light; a master, too, in the way in which he gives the effect of the complete and rounded form of objects by means of perspective, at the same time painting all those which are in full sunlight somewhat flat both in form and color, and causing them, as has been said, to appear to vibrate indistinctly before our eyes, just as would be the case were we looking from actual darkness into light.

Now we are so accustomed to exactly the opposite sort of an arrangement—to light in the foreground or in the middle distance of a picture, and to dim light or darkness in the background—that pictures of the kind that Pieter de Hooch and Vermeer of Delft painted are at first somewhat startling. We hardly know, indeed, what to make of this effect of waving, flickering light that is seen in so many of Vermeer's canvases, until we say to ourselves, "That is, after all, just the way in which such a scene would look to us, and the painter has dared to so represent it."

As a colorist, Jan Vermeer of Delft deserves all the praise, however extravagant, which is accorded him to-day because of his extraordinary effects. And, moreover, even if Gerard Dou, Ter Borch, and others are now often ranked as inferior to him, there is nothing to be said—their strength lay elsewhere than in the coloring and management of light in which Vermeer excelled. As a painter of light, indeed, he is unique, and in its portrayal he must ever be counted among the greatest masters, always inspiring the connoisseur and lover of art with wonder and admiration.—ABRIDGED FROM THE GERMAN

A. BREDIUS 'LES CHEFS-D'ŒUVRE DU MUSÉE D'AMSTERDAM'

VERMEER OF DELFT is a master of genre-painting. He did, it is true, paint landscapes—or rather townscapes—which have never been surpassed, such as the 'View of Delft' in the Gallery of The Hague and 'The Street' in the Six Collection at Amsterdam, but these are exceptions in his achievement. What he liked best were pictures containing one or two figures, at most three. These figures he placed in a room into which sunlight streams through a window, generally an open window. As a rule, the walls of the room are bare, covered with plaster, and illumined by an almost dazzling light. These bright walls are the backgrounds for figures which are invariably drawn correctly, and modeled with an astonishing effect of relief. To all this is added the charm of a color-scheme beautiful, strong, and harmonious.

Vermeer's manner of painting is vigorous and full of knowledge. The flesh-tones alone are sometimes pale and are treated with a certain delicacy. They have, moreover, in many of his pictures suffered from time and neglect. As a general thing, he is fond of contrasting a certain shade of deep indigo blue with a light lemon yellow.

The heads of the personages in Vermeer's pictures are full of expression, very varied, and exceedingly lifelike. His readers are all conscientiously reading. Absorbed in their occupation, they seem to be really thinking about what they are doing. In a word, Vermeer is, in his way, one of the greatest painters of all time. There is nothing antiquated about his work, nothing "out of date." Were his pictures to be seen to-day in any exhibition of the best modern work of a similar kind, they would be distinguishable only because of their greater perfection.—FROM THE FRENCH

ARSÈNE ALEXANDRE 'HISTOIRE POPULAIRE DE LA PEINTURE'

NOTWITHSTANDING marked differences between the works of Vermeer of Delft and those of Pieter de Hooch, it is impossible to dissociate the two painters in our minds, impossible not to draw comparisons between them. There is a touch of raillery in Vermeer which is lacking in Pieter de Hooch; he is colder and more reserved; he impresses you more forcibly. De Hooch is the painter of happy and contented people; Vermeer is rather the painter of elegance and luxury—although this statement should not be made without reservations. The women of De Hooch's pictures are for the most part worthy little souls, comfortably off in this world's goods, but, for all that, most careful housewives. Those whom Vermeer portrays, on the other hand, are pretty, idle creatures, somewhat indifferent, slightly enigmatic, very frivolous, and far more concerned with their love affairs than with any domestic duties.

Furthermore, the light in Vermeer's canvases, although dazzling and inexplicable, is not so warm nor so bright as it is in De Hooch's. His color-scheme, too, is noticeably different. Instead of strong reds, velvety blacks, creamy whites, rich caramel browns, and golden sunlight, there are lemon

yellows—soft and yet sharp—cold sky-blues, delicate grays, ermine whites, uncompromising ebony blacks, and sunlight more pallid than De Hooch's. The vivid notes which are prominent in this unusual scale by no means refute my statement, but rather confirm it. Compare, for instance, the use of red in the little 'Lace-maker' by Vermeer, in the Louvre, with the way in which that color is introduced in De Hooch's 'Card-party' in the same gallery. In the first, a bit of scarlet makes the light seem all the more cool and delicate; in the last, the red of the lady's dress renders it warmer and more abundant.

In the handling and management of their colors, again, there are differences equally great. Pieter de Hooch lays his color on freely; he spreads it on his canvas with a broad, flowing stroke, frankly and strongly; Vermeer is more mysterious, and, while carefully guarding the secret of his method, betrays a more studied way of working. He tells you enough to pique your curiosity, but he stops short just as you were about to discover the clue. His painting, indeed, is like the women of his pictures. It smiles upon you gaily, welcomes you, and beguiles you, but never does it give a complete and wholly satisfactory reply to your questioning.

All these are salient differences in the work of these two painters, and yet we needs must associate them in our thoughts. Vermeer, reserved and distant though he be, attracts and captivates as much as does De Hooch. He has his moments of simplicity—exquisite, indeed, although studied. Man of the world as he is, he is yet tender at times, even compassionate; and he, too, is, in his own way, a most ardent lover of light.

Wherever you may begin your study of Vermeer, in whatsoever gallery of Europe you may first become acquainted with his works, he will at once disconcert you by startling contradictions. If, for instance, you first see his pictures in Germany, he will seem to you—that is, if he be judged from his large canvas of 'A Girl and her Lover,' in the Dresden Gallery—as almost the direct opposite to what we have just described; although, as a matter of fact, when his work as a whole is taken into consideration, our synthesis will be found to be correct. And, indeed, if you turn from the Dresden picture to the one in the Berlin Gallery, 'The Lady with the Pearl Necklace,' you will at once find the Vermeer of our description.

Again, if Holland be the country where you begin your study of Vermeer, he will impress you when you look at his 'View of Delft,' in the Gallery of The Hague, as a virile painter, robust and warm. On the other hand, if you see his picture in the Ryks Museum, Amsterdam, of the 'Young Woman Reading a Letter,' he will strike you as a strong painter, it is true, but a little cold, perhaps, and of marked distinction. And if he be judged by others of his works in the same city—by those in the Six Collection—you will find him a man of true and delicate feeling, a painter of harmonies, rich and sustained.

Moreover, every one of these works reveals a different technique; unctuous in the Dresden picture, his painting is smooth and satiny in those of Berlin

and the Ryks Museum, while in that of The Hague, and in those of the Six Collection, Amsterdam, it is grainy, almost rough. But no matter how it varies, it is always well-nigh impossible to analyze, and in the whole of Vermeer's work, with its many differences of feeling and of treatment, with its frankness and its reticence—and all these extremes are expressed in an infinitely small number of pictures—the same man is recognizable throughout, always captivating, always entrancing.

Of the man himself, however, almost nothing is known. Out of the meager facts that have been learned concerning his life, any romance you please might be woven. But after all is said it comes down to this, that Vermeer of Delft was a very great painter, and that whatever may have been his environment, or from whomsoever he may have received his instruction in art—all that is of minor interest compared with the way in which we see his development and note the manner in which his knowledge bore fruit. . . .

In Vermeer of Delft we have a marked instance of the slight value which men put upon even the greatest art until fashion has indorsed it. During his lifetime Vermeer received his share of appreciation. He was regarded and sought out as one of the celebrities of his native town; but immediately after his death oblivion fell like a pall over the man and his works. . . . These works, however, works which have puzzled critics and are the despair of the most intrepid artists, are in themselves great enough to compensate us for our ignorance of his life and character. So slight an effort does there appear to be in these patiently executed pictures that it would seem as if it had been mere pastime for the painter to cover, in the few of his works which have come down to us, an immense field, ranging as it does from the light and playful side of life to the serious and grave—from the frivolous intrigues of a coquette to the deep peace of a little town sleeping like a lizard in the sun.

—ABRIDGED FROM THE FRENCH

FREDERICK WEDMORE 'THE MASTERS OF GENRE PAINTING'

THE habitual practice of Jan Vermeer of Delft was of a wider range than that of Pieter de Hooch. It is true that, unlike De Hooch, he rarely painted stories—was usually, though not always, content to place in his interiors a single figure. But in these interiors, whether of the rarer kind, as where there are two figures and some approach to a story, or of the commoner kind, where there is but one, and no story attempted but the story of a life very patient in its daily task—in these interiors it was less the play of the pure and vivid sunshine than of the milder daylight, under all conditions, that concerned and interested Vermeer. He has never, that I know, reached the gem-like quality of De Hooch's sunshine; but he is more preoccupied with problems not less difficult—the effect of light upon light, of reflected light on shadowed space, the effect of one thing's luster on such luster or texture as may happen to be near it. This De Hooch notes, and Nicolaes Maes notes, and both wonderfully, but neither, perhaps, with quite the keenness, quite the attention, of Vermeer of Delft.

IN subject both De Hooch and Vermeer occasionally painted townscapes; but they were chiefly devoted to the interior, with light coming in at the windows and illuminating a few figures. It was a subject common to the Dutch genre-painters; and yet De Hooch and Vermeer handled it quite differently from the others. They were more elevated in feeling, more select in types, architecture, surroundings, more brilliant in color, more transparent in light. But Vermeer was not so extensive or elaborate in composition as De Hooch, and possibly could not handle a complicated scene so well. He seldom painted a large interior with groups. A single figure in a corner of a room, with a window and sunlight, was his usual theme. The arrangement was simpler, but the mental point of view was not essentially different from that of De Hooch. His concern was for the material and the picturesque more than for the psychological or the intellectual; and his conception was usually summed up in sunshine, shadow, and color. He saw beautiful harmonies in such things, and he told of them with great vivacity and spirit.

In the disposition and adjustment of objects in his pictures he made some use of line, and usually opposed straight lines to curved ones, as was the practice of De Hooch and others. Deep shadow as a means of composition he did not frequently use. He laid a veil of light and shadow like his contemporaries; but it was thinner, less apparent to the eye, than with, say, Ostade or Metsu. His light was clear, and seemed to have the intensity of real sunlight; and, as a result, his color was bright, with a gay surface quality about it. De Hooch was fond of golden sunlight, and warm, rich notes of red and yellow; Vermeer's tones, if not opposed, were different. He was fond of all colors, reds and Naples yellow included, and he used them knowingly; but he at first preferred a silvery tone, and employed that most unmanageable of all cool colors, blue. A number of his pictures, indeed, have something like a blue envelop about them—as, for example, the admirable little picture by him in the Metropolitan Museum, New York. We know that Gainsborough, as opposed to Reynolds, was fond of this hue, but he used it (in his 'Blue Boy' and elsewhere) purely for the sake of blue as a color. In Vermeer's pictures one is inclined to think it was used for another purpose. It heightened the effect of light. Vermeer evidently had an inkling of what the modern impressionists have discovered; namely, that there is less luminosity in white than in blue. White is dead, flat, opaque; while blue, thinly laid, is transparent, vibrant, scintillating. There was certainly no painter of the time, not even Rembrandt with his sharp contrasts, who gained greater height of light than Vermeer; and something of it was due to his use of blue.

There is nothing peculiar or personal about either his drawing or his modeling. His line is clear, concise, well understood, at times beautiful in its simplicity; and his modeling has solidity, strength, and character; but this may be as truly said of any trained painter of the Dutch school. In brushwork he was decidedly individual; and yet, if the connection could be traced,

he might be thought in this respect a follower of Hals, wide apart as their handlings seem at first blush. He was Hals in little. The same staccato quality, the same quick touch, the same flat modeling, appear in the only life-sized work by Vermeer now in existence—a somewhat repainted group of figures at Dresden. In the small panels he usually painted, this handling is materially modified by the regard for size, and yet a study of the picture at the Metropolitan Museum will disclose the crisp stroke so characteristic of Hals. This kind of brush-work is peculiar only to his early pictures. Later on he seems to have changed his manner (and something of his blue tone) in accordance with fashionable dictation, and painted a smooth surface with pale, varied colors, as in the little 'Lace-maker' of the Louvre and in the 'Lady at a Spinet' in the National Gallery, London.

There are very few of Vermeer's pictures left to us, and some of them are not altogether good; but at his best he is a very charming painter, winning as the French Chardin, and just as frank in spirit. He is a poet, but, again, like almost all of the Dutchmen, he is so only in the poetry of materials, such as light, color, atmosphere, and values.

ALFRED WOLTMANN AND KARL WOERMANN 'GESCHICHTE DER MALEREI'

JAN VERMEER OF DELFT is celebrated as a landscape and genre painter. His subjects are of the utmost simplicity and are taken direct from nature. Sometimes he represents the streets of Delft; sometimes he shows us a room in one or another of the houses of his native town, in which he places a young girl, or, it may be, a pair of lovers; and once he painted a study of life-sized figures.

The extraordinary charm of Vermeer's pictures, that about them which for the past fifty years has given him the high position which he occupies among Dutch painters, lies wholly in their marvelous technique—in the painter's free and knowing brush-work, which is as far removed from any excessively rough breadth of stroke as it is from too smooth a finish; and above all does it lie in his conception and treatment of light and color. In his outdoor scenes the light is strong and glowing, but in his interiors Vermeer understands how to introduce the light in such a way that these pictures are invested with a delicate and poetic beauty—a beauty of chiaroscuro—peculiarly his own.

His paintings of this description are distinguishable from those of Pieter de Hooch, with which they have frequently been confounded, in the first place because of their greater simplicity in the arrangement of the room—in Vermeer's compositions, for example, we see only one apartment, whereas Pieter de Hooch shows us several opening into one another—and in the second place because of the color-scheme, which, as a rule, is very different from that employed by De Hooch. Vermeer's favorite colors are blue—a tender, cool, moonlight blue—and a pale lemon yellow; these are sometimes placed in opposition, and again are blended with the most delicate touch imaginable into a perfect harmony of tone.—FROM THE GERMAN

ALFRED PELTZER 'MALWEISE UND STIL IN DER HOLLÄNDISCHEN KUNST'

THERE is no spot on Vermeer's canvases devoid of living, moving light; no spot where even darkness is dull and lifeless. In every shadow some color is astir, and in every corner, no matter how remote, light, penetrating and all-pervading, is ceaselessly at work producing color. Delicately and tremulously this light waves and shimmers, in the ever-changing effect of the magic play of chiaroscuro, from the darkest shadows to the most luminous brightness. Here we see light painted in light, there darkness in darkness, and all things are united by imperceptible transitions. Reflections, acting and reacting, subtly connect a hundred separate objects, and bring into harmony all the varying shades and gradations of the different colors. At the same time there is no actual "*sfumato*" spread like a veil of varnish over the canvas. No, Vermeer would have scorned any such expedient to obtain a color effect, for he was master of a far higher artistic power. Graciously he allowed the clear bright colors to have free play, but even in their play he was watchful to see that no discord or interference should occur, but that by the unceasing and interchanging effect of light all should be brought into perfect accord.

Vermeer never attempts to depict separate masses of light in any fixed or defined limits. In his interior scenes, for instance, we do not find any line of sunbeams bounded by a window-frame and held in some one definite form; nor are there in his landscapes single rays of the sun, such as we see in many of Ruysdael's pictures. Light on his canvases is diffused over all—the soft, quiet, even, sun-steeped light of day. Whence it comes we scarcely question; enough that it is there, and that it lives and moves. With such absolute fidelity to nature, indeed, is it portrayed, that its course as it gleams and glides back and forth upon the picture might easily be followed, and we are lost in amazement at the masterly skill with which the painter has represented this most subtle of all the workings of nature. . . .

Vermeer's interior scenes show us, as do Pieter de Hooch's, pictures of Dutch home life, but they are different in their arrangement from the works of that painter. He does not, for instance, depict any planes in space—no vistas are given from one room into others beyond. Depth in Vermeer's pictures is for the most part a minor matter, and consequently that illusion produced so often in Pieter de Hooch's scenes by means of the perspective foreshortening of tiled floors, or of side walls, does not, as a rule, exist in regard to his work. The beams of the ceiling, if they show at all, do not project vertically into the picture, but lie horizontally before the spectator; and, in fact, the whole disposition of the room is, intentionally on the artist's part, quite different from that of De Hooch. Again, we do not always find in Vermeer's work those sober and somewhat severe domestic scenes in which bare walls and straight lines predominate, giving the idea of space; but, instead, we are often shown soft materials—tapestry carpets, and draperies of silk and plush, which are introduced into the picture as curtains, portières, tablecloths, furniture-covering, and garments—presenting themselves to our eyes as masses of color, and taking away, or at any rate softening, the effect of hard lines and sharply defined forms.

Pieter de Hooch painted from preference and with good reason the peasants and middle-class citizens of Holland, and sometimes the Dutch patricians, simple in their customs and in their ways of living; but we find the master of Delft quite at home in more aristocratic surroundings, in apartments more luxurious in their appointments, as, for example, in the picture of himself in his studio, where we see him arrayed in silk and satin, and where in the foreground a wonderful curtain of rich colors is draped across the front of his workroom. In his rendering of different materials Vermeer compares favorably with any one of those famous Dutch painters renowned for the miniature-like delicacy of their touch, but it is always by means of color-producing light, or still more of light and shade, that the objects in his pictures are created before our very eyes in a way that is distinctly his own. . . .

Vermeer avoids all sharp outlines, making them indistinct with the help of a play of light and color at the edges of any object that he introduces into his pictures. In this way definite contours disappear, and at the same time the relation that each object bears to every other is made manifest by the laws of light. He paints with soft liquid colors and often with a fine glazing, thus making possible the most delicate transitions of light and shade. Here and there he touches with a fine brush little points of high light, especially in his draperies and rough wall-surfaces, or on wood, where he wishes to emphasize in any one kind of material numerous tiny particles of light and of form.

He uses yellow freely; not, however, in its strongest tones, but always in soft, tender shades, contrasting them with blue, which may be called his most characteristic color. Ultramarine, indeed, and a certain almost indescribable shade of indigo blue—a "moonlight blue," as Woermann has felicitously called it, and which is familiar to every one who is acquainted with Vermeer's pictures—are the foundation tones of the luminous darkness in most of the master's works. From these blues he forms his shadows; in their dusky tones he dips those rich draperies, those heavy hangings, and thick table-covers that we see in his pictures. They form, so to speak, the base of his whole color-scheme, and in their various indescribable shadings they are peculiar to Vermeer alone. Certain tones of yellow which he often combines with them exactly complement his unusual blues. These yellow shades are apparent in his illuminated surfaces, in the gleaming silken garments of his women, and also in their tender flesh-tones—in a word, they are to be found wherever through the shadowy realm of darkness some delicate, trembling light forces itself into being. . . .

He who has but a passing acquaintance with the painter of Delft cannot have any truly sympathetic understanding of his work. His pictures are so calm, so peaceful, that they seem almost silent; his subjects are in themselves so simple and insignificant that we scarcely give them a thought; but, as a matter of fact, they are as carefully selected and as full of expression as are the types of his figures, those delicate creations of his brush invested with so exquisite a feeling.

Other artists may represent dramatic scenes, sensual joys, ardent love, or the agonies of death, but in Vermeer's works there is an atmosphere of tran-

quil peace, of calm content and innocent happiness, and when we look long at his pictures—symphonies they might be called—it seems as if the harmonious waves of color might in their vibrations readily dissolve into tones of soft and gentle music.—ABRIDGED FROM THE GERMAN

The Works of Vermeer of Delft

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PLATES

'THE LADY WITH THE PEARL NECKLACE' PLATE I

THIS picture, now in the Berlin Gallery, was painted in Vermeer's late period and is one of his most exquisite works. The subject—a lady standing before a mirror fastening about her throat a necklace of pearls—is of the utmost simplicity. The lady is, as Muther remarks, "neither graceful nor beautiful; neither in her features nor in her expression is there anything striking; but in delicacy of execution and in perfect harmony of tone this little picture is a marvel."

Against a pale gray background the figure of the young woman stands in finely modeled relief. She wears a canary yellow jacket bordered with ermine, and a gray skirt. In her blonde hair a red ribbon is tied. On the table before her, which is partly covered with the ample folds of some blue drapery, are a blue Japanese jar and various small articles of the toilet. The chair in the foreground is upholstered in deep garnet-colored velvet, and farther back we see a portion of another chair covered with flowered material, brownish olive in tone. Light streams through a window in the back part of the picture, touching the folds of the saffron-colored curtain hanging beside it, falling on the face and upper part of the figure of the lady, illumining the wall, and so permeating the atmosphere that even in the shadows the colors are blended in a wonderful harmony. "It is a fascinating picture," writes Arsène Alexandre, "and always to be remembered as one of the gems of painting."

The canvas measures nearly two feet high by one foot and a half wide.

'THE MUSIC LESSON' PLATE II

SUBJECTS such as this were very popular among the Dutch genre-painters of the seventeenth century, who repeatedly introduced into their interior scenes persons engaged in playing upon musical instruments. In this picture in the Royal Gallery, Windsor, Vermeer has represented a portion of a room, paved with marble, and furnished in simple elegance. A table covered with a heavy Persian cloth, such as he frequently used among the accessories of his pictures, is in the foreground. Far back against a light gray wall is a spinet with inlaid case, and before it, her hands upon the keyboard of the instrument, stands a young girl, her head and shoulders reflected in

the mirror hanging above. The gentleman beside her—her music-master, according to the title of the picture—richly dressed in the fashion of the day, listens attentively as he rests one arm upon the spinet and supports the other upon the bow of his violoncello, which lies upon the floor near-by.

There is more story told in this picture than is usual in Vermeer's works; but, after all, the chief interest lies in the effect of light as it comes through the casement windows at the side, touches the two figures, and illumines some of the objects in the room with its radiance, leaving others in soft dusky shadow.

'THE COQUETTE' PLATE III

THE Gallery of Brunswick, Germany, possesses this masterpiece by Vermeer of Delft which Bürger has called 'The Coquette,' a name so admirably suited to the picture that it has been adopted here rather than the more prosaic title by which it is sometimes called— 'The Young Girl with the Wine-glass.' The subject is unlike the majority of Vermeer's works and bears a resemblance to those portrayed by Ter Borch, by Metsu, or others of the Dutch "Little Masters," who were fond of representing such scenes of gallantry.

Vermeer here shows us a richly appointed chamber in which three people are assembled. The principal figure, the one upon which our interest centers, is that of the young girl seated before us. She wears a full skirt of rose-colored silk, a bodice of the same with elbow-sleeves of canary yellow embroidered with gold, and turns her laughing face towards us, as she takes a glass of wine from a gentleman. As he presents it to her, he gallantly bows over her uplifted hand, under which he has placed his own as if gently urging her to taste the wine, looking at her as he does so with an expression of unconcealed admiration. He wears a mouse-colored cloak, and broad white collar and sleeve-ruffles. In the shadow, farther back, another gentleman in greenish gray embroidered doublet, apparently unmindful of the little love passage being enacted so near him, is seated beside a table covered with a deep blue cloth, upon which are a silver platter containing two oranges, a jug of bluish porcelain, and a snow-white napkin.

Light enters the room through a half-open casement window, some of the leaded panes of which bear coats of arms in stained glass. The gray wall of the background, upon which hangs a picture suggestive of a portrait by Rembrandt, is partly in shadow and partly in full light; against the light and silvery portion the head and upper part of the figure of the young girl are delicately outlined, and the carved back of the chair in which she sits is distinctly silhouetted.

"I know of no more delicious genre picture in the whole range of seventeenth-century Dutch art," writes Bürger, "than this one in the Brunswick Gallery by Vermeer of Delft. . . . The execution is earnest; the painting 'tight' and without any loading, unless it may be in some little spots of high light in the brighter places and in the accessories. Not even Ter Borch ever painted with a more delicate touch or more exquisite harmony of color."

'YOUNG WOMAN OPENING A CASEMENT' PLATE IV

VERMEER'S marked predilection for blue is nowhere more strikingly exemplified than in this picture, in which the whole atmosphere seems permeated with his favorite hue. The young woman with her hand upon the frame of a casement which she is in the act of opening, wears a dark blue skirt, so dark as to be almost black in shadow, a white bodice bordered and trimmed with blue, and a white kerchief covering her head and falling over her shoulders. Behind a table with a variegated Persian cloth, on which are a ewer and basin, brownish yellow in color, and a yellow box, stands a blue chair with a cloak of lighter blue thrown over it. The wall, on which a map is hanging, is a neutral gray.

The figure of the young woman, admirable in modeling and pose, the effect of the light coming through the window on the left, and the cool blue tones of the atmospheric envelop, luminous even in shadow, are all rendered with that delicacy and consummate skill peculiar to Vermeer of Delft. The picture is indeed, as Sir Walter Armstrong has said, "a masterpiece of composition and chiaroscuro."

The canvas measures almost seventeen inches high by fifteen inches wide. Formerly in the possession of an Irish nobleman, Lord Powerscourt, it was purchased in 1887 from M. Pillet, in Paris, by the late Mr. Henry Marquand, who presented it to the Metropolitan Museum, New York, where it now hangs.

'VIEW OF DELFT' PLATE V

IN this picture we have a remarkable example of Vermeer's skill as a landscapist. The technique is broad, sure, and masterly; the impasto solid; the touch fat and staccato; and so thoroughly modern is the treatment that the painting might easily be mistaken for the work of one of the French landscapists of to-day.

"Vermeer's 'View of Delft,'" writes Arsène Alexandre, "is a masterpiece of simplicity. It is strong without being brutal. The town lies before us, washed by the waters of the Rotterdam canal. The red and blue roofs, the houses with their pointed gables, a little bridge with a single arch, two women standing on the shore in the foreground; a few steps beyond, a group of people near a boat—such are the elements that make up this marvelous picture. But what words can express the breadth with which these different objects are rendered, or describe the perfect stillness of those gray waters of the canal, in whose calm surface the reflections of the city's walls form great, vague, greenish silhouettes. The manner in which this work is painted is impossible to analyze; seemingly simple, it is yet as mysterious as art itself."

"The foreground," writes Sir Walter Armstrong, "is broad almost to emptiness, but the town beyond the canal is built up with a hand that never falters, guided by an eye that never shrinks. The breadth of red roof, of yellow and purple brick, of green foliage peeping over garden walls, the shad-

ows sleeping in the drowsy canals, and the blinding sunlight—playing here upon the pinnacles of the Nieuwe Kerk, and there upon a salient gable—are set down with a combination of frankness and instinctive selection to which the whole range of Dutch art scarcely affords a parallel."

The picture, which is on canvas and measures three feet three inches high by nearly four feet wide, is in the Gallery of The Hague.

'THE LACE-MAKER' PLATE VI

THIS little picture, formerly in a private collection in Rotterdam, was acquired in 1870 by the Louvre, where it is to-day the only example of the work of Vermeer of Delft.

The young girl here represented is seated before a work-table upon which the implements of her trade are arranged. With eyes intently bent upon her cushion with its long bobbins, and with fingers deftly managing the pins, she seems completely absorbed in her task of lace-making. Her light brown hair is smoothly brushed and arranged in curls on either side. She wears a bodice of lemon yellow, over which is a broad lace collar. Touches of blue and pink are on her cushion, and on the table beside her are a book, and a blue pillow with a striped border of red and white, and with red tassels.

The room in which the girl sits is devoid of all ornament; but the bare, pearl-gray wall behind her is brilliant with the light which bathes its surface, which illumines one side of her face, falls upon her yellow bodice, and touches her busy little hands, so beautiful in their modeling.

The picture is on canvas and measures only about nine inches high by eight inches wide.

'A GIRL AND HER LOVER' PLATE VII

THIS picture in the Dresden Gallery bears the date 1656, and is, therefore, an early work of Vermeer's, having been painted when he was but twenty-four years old. The figures are life-sized; the general tone is warmer and the brush-work broader and less finished than in his later works. In color, too, the painting is less delicate. The lemon yellow of the girl's jacket and the white of her cap stand out in bold relief against the fiery red of the coat of her lover who is behind her, his face shadowed by a large gray felt hat trimmed with green and yellow feathers. The older woman in the background is in black, as is also the young man at the left of the picture, holding a glass of wine in one hand and a guitar in the other. A black cloak is thrown over the balcony behind which these figures are placed, and which is covered with the heavy folds of a Persian carpet patterned in red and yellow on a gray ground. Standing at one corner of this balcony, at the extreme right, is a stone jug with blue designs, forming a contrast to the rich colored wine in the glass next it which the girl holds in her hand.

That this picture, which Bürger considers "in composition, in character, in drawing, and in color wholly Rembrandtesque," is strikingly unlike Vermeer's later conversation pieces, is clear at a glance. Strong and vigorous it

certainly is, supple in technique, and harmonious in its color-scheme; but those exquisite effects of light, that exceeding delicacy of touch, that indescribably subtle blending of colors, characteristic of Vermeer's more mature works, are not apparent here. It has often been called the artist's masterpiece; may it not rather be regarded, as a recent critic, Dr. Alfred Peltzer, has suggested, as the bold and somewhat extravagant work of an exceptionally gifted young artist, who painted this masterly study of life-sized figures in all the exuberance of his as yet not wholly developed talent?

The picture is on canvas and measures four feet eight inches high by four feet three inches wide.

'YOUNG WOMAN READING A LETTER' PLATE VIII

IN this picture in the Ryks Museum, Amsterdam, Vermeer has painted one of his characteristically simple subjects. A young woman seen in profile, and wearing a loose sack of light blue silk and a greenish gray skirt, is absorbed in reading a letter as she stands before a table covered with blue drapery. Two chairs and a large map hanging on a sunlit wall complete the scene.

Time has greatly injured the painting, which has suffered also from over-cleaning, but its cool, tender tone of coloring, the peculiar bluish atmospheric effect, and the wonderful lighting of the canvas entitle it to a high place among Vermeer's works. It measures a little over one foot and a half high by one foot three inches wide.

'A LADY AT A SPINET' PLATE IX

THIS picture in the National Gallery, London, offers an excellent example of Vermeer's skill in the treatment of light. A cool general effect peculiar to this artist pervades the scene, and in the smooth surface and pale colors we recognize a work of his middle period. The room is paved with squares of black and white marble; the wall, suffused with light from without, is of a delicate pearly gray; the spinet is brown, and the lady standing before it, her hands upon the keyboard, wears a skirt of gleaming grayish white satin with a bodice of rich blue silk. In the foreground is a chair covered with blue velvet, and on the wall hang two pictures, of which the smaller one, the landscape, is framed in sparkling gold, while the black frame of the other picture, which represents a cupid holding in his uplifted hand a clock, forms the strongest note of color in the scene.

Unfortunately the picture has suffered in parts from over-cleaning, and the gray under-painting thus revealed gives it a colder appearance than it originally had. In spite of this, however, it possesses great charm of light and of color, and, as Mr. Timothy Cole has said, "The varied adjustment of the spaces in the arrangement of the whole is a study in itself."

The picture is on canvas and measures one foot eight inches high by one foot and a half wide.

LIBRARY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

'THE PAINTER IN HIS STUDIO' PLATE X

THE only authentic representation of Vermeer of Delft—the nearest approach to a portrait of the artist that exists—has come down to us in this picture, now in the Czernin Gallery, Vienna.

The painter, dressed in a black doublet slashed with white, black velvet breeches, red stockings over which are pulled a pair of loosely fitting white ones, and with a black cap partly covering his long brown hair, is here shown seated at an easel, mahlstick in hand, engaged in representing on his canvas the figure of a young girl posing before him. She is dressed in a pale blue mantle and a gray skirt edged with black. In one hand she holds a book bound in yellow, and in the other a long brass trumpet, while on her head is a wreath of laurel-leaves. A map, brownish yellow in tone, hangs on the light wall behind her; beneath this, at one side, is a chair covered with garnet-colored velvet, and in the left foreground is a table, upon which are a plaster cast, some drawings, and pieces of richly colored drapery.

Waagen says of this picture, "In the beautiful harmony of its colors, the mellowness of its tone, and the breadth of handling which it reveals, we have one of the finest works of Vermeer's maturity." Sir Walter Armstrong feels, however, that it lacks the charm of many of Vermeer's earlier and simpler compositions. "The passionate sincerity which is their characteristic," he says, "here gives place to delight in skill. All sorts of technical difficulties are met and overcome, but one cannot look at the picture without feeling that as Vermeer's skill grew his passion cooled—that his sense of what things were was overborne by his interest in how they looked; in a word, that he rendered rather than created. . . . But after all is said, the Czernin picture remains a great work."

This painting, which is in a state of excellent preservation, was formerly attributed to Pieter de Hooch. It was Bürger who restored it to its rightful owner, whose signature he discovered in the lower part of the map.

A LIST OF THE PRINCIPAL PAINTINGS BY VERMEER OF DELFT WITH THEIR PRESENT LOCATIONS

AUSTRIA. Vienna, Czernin Gallery: The Painter in his Studio (Plate x)—BELGIUM. Brussels, Arenberg Palace: Portrait of a Young Woman—ENGLAND. London, National Gallery: A Lady at a Spinet (Plate ix)—London, Owned by C. H. Bischoffsheim, Esq: Girl playing on a Guitar—London, Owned by S. Joseph, Esq: The Soldier and the Laughing Girl—Windsor, Royal Gallery: The Music Lesson (Plate ii)—FRANCE. Paris, Louvre: The Lace-maker (Plate vi)—Paris, Owned by M. Rudolph Kann: The Sleeping Girl—GERMANY. Berlin Gallery: The Lady with the Pearl Necklace (Plate i)—Brunswick Gallery: The Coquette (Plate iii)—Dresden, Royal Gallery: A Girl and her Lover (Plate vii); Young Woman reading a Letter—Frankfort, Städel Institute: The Geographer—HOLLAND. Amsterdam, Ryks Museum: Young Woman reading a Letter (Plate viii)—Amsterdam, Six Collection: The Milkmaid; The Street—Amsterdam, Owned by Mr. J. F. van Lennep: Interior—The Hague Gallery: View of Delft (Plate v)—UNITED STATES. Boston, Collection of Mrs. John L. Gardner: The Concert—New York, Metropolitan Museum: Young Woman opening a Casement (Plate iv).

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A LIST OF THE PRINCIPAL BOOKS AND MAGAZINE ARTICLES DEALING WITH VERMEER OF DELFT

THE chief sources of information concerning Vermeer of Delft are W. Bürger's 'Musées de la Hollande' (Paris, 1858-60); an article in three parts by the same writer in the 'Gazette des Beaux-Arts' for 1866, and a short monograph by Henry Havard entitled 'Van der Meer de Delft' (Paris, 1888), which, in the light of more recent discoveries regarding the painter, supplements or corrects many of Bürger's statements.

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